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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-19

Beavertail Hill State Recreation Area

May 19, 1972

Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department
Recreation and Parks Division
Helena, Montana

BEAVERTAIL HILL STATE RECREATION AREA

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

I. PURPOSE

Developments proposed for Beavertail Hill State Recreation Area are to provide overnight camping, day use, fishing, and access to the Clark Fork River for float trips.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The site is located approximately 25 miles east of Missoula and about ¼ mile off Interstate 90. The improvements planned for the project include repairing or replacing approximately 3,500 feet of existing fence, the drilling of a water well, a water distribution system, underground power distribution lines, one modern comfort station with septic tank and drain field, one vault-type latrine, interior roads, parking areas, camper parking areas, administrative site, trailer dump station, trash receptacles, directional signing, trails and site cleanup.

Development planned for the site will be accomplished in two phases. Phase one will include the camp loop with facilities for 16 units and will provide parking, water and latrine facilities for overflow camping in the future day use area.

Phase two will provide space for an additional 35 to 40 camping units and will complete the facility installation in the day use area. This will be done at a later date when funds are available.

III. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A. Human Resources

The project is located in Missoula County, which has a population of 58,263. The City of Missoula is located 25 miles to the west and has a population of 29,497. Drummond is 22 miles east with a population of 494. The area immediately adjacent to the recreation area has a sparse rural population.

Interstate Highway 90 is approximately ¼ mile to the north of the site, with an interchange provided at that point. During the month of June in 1971, the average daily traffic flow was 5,030 vehicles. In July, it was 5,744 vehicles, and in August it was 5,668. These figures indicate that this is probably the most heavily traveled stretch of highway in Montana.

Surveys conducted by a consulting firm revealed that 20 percent of the vehicles on this highway are recreation in nature. We can anticipate that the project will receive heavy overnight camper use from travelers along the highway.

B. Physiography and Geology

The site encompasses an area of 65 acres. A Forest Service access road forms the boundary on the north end of the property. The Chicago-Milwaukee-Saint Paul & Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Northern Railroad mainline tracks are immediately adjacent to the road. A county road borders on the west and the Clark Fork River forms the east boundary. The southerly limit of the property lies approximately 200 feet south of one of the future camp loops.

The terrain is flat with the exception of an abandoned railroad grade which traverses diagonally through the northern one-third of the site. This grade raises to an elevation of about 6 feet above the terrain and is overgrown with grass, brush and weeds. In the southern portion, on the westerly side, is a small slough area.

The soil is silty loams with underlying gravely beds. Indications are that the mineral contents are of no commercial value.

C. Land Use

The site has had only very limited use since the Fish and Game Department purchased it in September of 1968, and evidence indicates that the site was not used for at least two or more years prior to that date. The portion north of the abandoned railroad grade was cultivated and used as a hay meadow at one time, and the balance of the area has been used for grazing. Since this use was abandoned several years ago, the area is now overgrown with grasses, weeds and brush.

D. Fish and Wildlife

The area provides habitat for birds and small animals. Beaver dams in the slough appear to be inactive at the present time. Although both Whitetail and Mule deer frequent the area on occasion, the site does not provide critical range during any time of the year.

In the Clark Fork River there is a fair to good population of Brown Trout, with individuals up to 3 pounds. There are a few rainbow and cutthroat trout in the 12 to 14 inch range. There is a good whitefish population, with individuals up to 2 pounds. Non-game fish include northern squaw fish, white and large scale suckers, long nosed dace, and red side shiner. The aquatic insect population is rated as good.

E. Vegetative Resources

The southern two-thirds of the site has tree cover interspersed with open spaces. The trees are primarily cottonwood, with some mature ponderosa pine. A number of small pines are starting to develop. The undergrowth is native grasses, forbs, and brush. The vegetation has not been distrubed by grazing for a number of years and has grown quite rank. The northern one-third does not have any trees and is covered with native grass.

F. Climate

The project area is located approximately 90 miles west of the continental divide at an elevation of about 3,300 feet. Temperatures are relatively moderate with occasional sub-zero readings in the winter months and hot days and cool nights in the summer. Rainfall will average 15 inches or more, and the growing season will run from late April to early October.

G. Transportation Systems

There are no transportation systems in the project site. Interstate 90, the Chicago-Milwaukee-Saint Paul & Pacific Railroad, and the Burlington Northern Railroad are adjacent to the north boundary. A Forest Service road and a county road form the north and west boundaries of the project.

H. Utility Systems

There is an electric transmission line that dips into the northeastern edge of the property. It extends through the area for a distance of about 400 feet and its deepest penetration is about 100 feet.

IV. EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

The project does not include any construction or other influences that will appreciably affect water quality, atomospheric quality, erosion, deposition or sedimentation. There are aquatic plants and fish on or adjacent to the project, but they will not be affected. There will be a disturbance to the grasses, forbs, and brush on the interior road alignment, parking areas, water distribution lines, electric power distribution lines, and sewer lines. The topsoil from these excavations will be preserved, replaced, and finally reseeded after completion of the construction. A few trees may have to be removed for the road alignment or parking spurs, but such removal will be held to an absolute minimum. While the exact number is not yet known, it is estimated that fewer than half a dozen trees will be affected.

The interior roads and parking areas will be gravel surfaced. The width of the two directional roadway will be 24 feet including shoulders. The width of the one-way travel network will be 12 feet including shoulders. The roadway and parking areas will be gravel surfaced to a depth of 6 inches. The parking areas will generally run 20 feet beyond the roadway. The parking spurs will be 25 feet deep and 20 feet wide. The roadway and parking areas will conform to the natural ground surface as much as possible. Cuts and fills will be kept to an absolute minimum. Cut tops will be rounded to blend into the natural terrain and to minimize erosion. Topsoil from the road excavation will be saved, spread on the shoulders and seeded.

The overall area is to be sheet drained. But, on a limited basis, and as required, small "V" ditches adjacent to the access roads will be constructed to divert drainage to natural channels.

The only grading that will be required will be that grading necessary to construct interior roads, the administrative site, sanitary trailer dump station and the parking areas for overflow camping in the future day use site. This grading will constitute removal of the vegetation within the construction limits of the areas, as mentioned above. The only significant cut will be through the old railroad grade. In this particular area, a cut of approximately 6 feet will be necessary through the width of the old road bed. The back slope will be laid back to blend with the terrain. Material from this excavation will be used in the old railroad borrows and near the dump station and administrative site, and in the approach to the county road at the park entrance.

A well will be drilled to an estimated depth of 60 feet to provide water service to all facilities. Care will be taken during construction to prevent contamination of the ground water. The well casing will be grouted to prevent surface water from entering the well, with the top left 1 foot above the project level of a 50 year run-off.

The well water distribution system mains and laterals will be plastic pipe. The water line will be placed at a depth of 6 feet below grade. All receiver tanks will be placed in above ground pump houses.

A sealed septic tank will be provided to receive sewage from the administrative site, trailer dump station and modern comfort station. The effluent from this tank will be pumped through a sealed system to the drain field for disposal. This drain field will be located in the abandoned railroad fill. A single perforated line will be buried approximately 2 feet in the center of the fill which is 14 feet wide at the top. This will place the disposal area approximately 9 to 10 feet above normal ground water table (which in this

area is about the same as the river level) and about 1 foot to 1½ feet above the level of the projected 50 year flood elevation. Perculation tests have shown the soil in the fill to be very suitable for drain field application. Effluent is not expected to leach out the sides of the fill. The fill is heavily covered with weeds and grasses which will readily transpire any additional moisture. However, if necessary the field can be readily expanded by adding to the length of the single line. The field will be over 400 feet from the river at its nearest point, and about 350 feet from the well.

Studies by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation indicate that virtually all of the site would be flooded by a 50 year frequency run-off level. Water depths on the site would range from a few inches on the highest ground to almost 6 feet in the low drainages. In the areas where the comfort station and well would be located, the water could be up to 2½ feet deep during a 50 year flood.

The well and comfort station locations would be built up by earth fill to an elevation of at least 1 foot above the 50 year flow level. The well would be sealed to prevent entry of surface water. The caretaker's quarters would be temporary and mobile. Other facilities, such as tables and stoves, would be removed prior to flood danger periods.

None of the property has been flooded in the three years that the Fish and Game Department has owned it. According to neighbors who have homesteaded and lived their entire lives in the vicinity, 1908 was the last time the site was completely flooded. In 1935 the water came up in the the lower drainages but the areas where the facilities are to be located stayed dry.

The danger of contamination by the septic tank overflowing during flooding will be minimized by pumping the tank each fall at the end of the recreation season and partially refilling it with clean water. In addition, the entire system will be sealed below the 50 year run-off level.

The small double latrine will have a sealed vault which will be pumped as required, with the sewage disposed off the site as required by the Department of Health. This facility, too, will be constructed on earth fill at least 1 foot above 50 year flood level.

The old fences on the west and north sides of the site will be repaired or replaced with new fencing.

A small boating access facility will be placed on the river bank just north of the day use area. This will provide access to the Clark Fork River for visitors who may wish to enjoy a float trip. The site will consist of a parking area

and a cul-de-sac about 50 feet from shore. No river bank or bottom excavation is planned. Small boats will be hand carried to the river from the parking area by the boaters.

B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

The project is considered to have a minimum of adverse environmental effects.

C. Alternatives

An alternative to the proposed development would be to eliminate all construction and leave the site in its present state. The Fish and Game Department purchased the site to provide access to the Clark Fork River and to provide camping and picnic facilities in an area where such opportunities are lacking. The heavy traffic on Interstate 90, with its high percentage of recreation vehicles, indicates a need for this type of facility. If no development were undertaken, the public would be denied an excellent opportunity for outdoor recreation.

D. Short Term - Long Term Use

There will be minor disturbances to the environment during the construction period. These disturbances will be relatively short in duration and minor in nature.

When the construction period has been completed, the area will be open to visitation by the general public. Management techniques will be applied to control the anticipated heavy use of the site. These will include properly spaced camp sites and traffic control structures. A resident caretaker will be employed to assure proper use of the area.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

None of the proposed actions are considered irreversible or irretrievable. All developments could be obliterated and the site restored to its natural state.

F. Discussion of Problems and Objections by Other Agencies and the Public

The proposed facility will provide camping space and access to the Clark Fork River. These facilities are in demand in the Missoula area and public acceptance is anticipated.

V. BENEFITS

Beavertail Hill State Recreation Area is located in a scenic area adjacent to the Clark Fork River. With overnight camping

facilities, it will provide an outdoor recreational experience for visitors who wish to take advantage of its accommodations. The day use and boating opportunities will be of value to the residents of Missoula, Drummond, and surrounding areas. Its location, adjacent to Interstate 90, will fill a need for camping facilities along this heavily traveled highway.

VI. SUMMARY STATEMENT

The analysis of the environmental impacts on the Beavertail Hill State Recreation Area indicates that they will be very minor. Where impacts do occur, the design process, along with management techniques, will reduce them to an acceptable level. The public will benefit from the accommodations provided by the facility.

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